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SIX WHO PASS WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BY STUART WALKER



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EDITED BY FRANK SHAY



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SIX WHO PASS WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BY

STUART WALKER

Author of Portmanteau Plays and More Portmanteau Plays



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221

1721 July 1921
S.W.

It is advisable in presenting SIX WHO PASS to precede the play with the Prologue to The Portmanteau Theatre, which is to be found in PORTMANTEAU PLAYS by Stuart Walker.

A delightful evening of plays can be made up of (1) The Prologue to the Portmanteau Theatre, (2) THE TRIMPLET, (3) NEVERTHELESS or THE VERY NAKED BOY or THE MEDICINE SHOW, (4) SIX WHO PASS WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL. All these plays can be found in PORTMANTEAU PLAYS or MORE PORTMANTEAU PLAYS by Stuart Walker, published by Stewart Kidd Company.

It is advisable in playing SIX WHO PASS not to attempt any sort of mechanical arrangement of the Butterfly. A personification of it would be even more distracting. The best plan to follow is to have a stationary, large butterfly poised somewhere near the windows in the back wall of the kitchen.

SIX WHO PASS WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

First performance at Christodora House, New York City,
July 14, 1915

PROLOGUE TO THE THEATRE	<i>Hugh Dillman</i>
PROLOGUE TO THE PLAY	<i>Henry Kiefer</i>
THE DEVICE-BEARER	<i>Edmond Crenshaw</i>
IN THE AUDIENCE	<i>Francis Stevens</i>

THE BOY	<i>James W. Morrison</i>
THE QUEEN	<i>Judith Lowry</i>
THE MIME	<i>Richard Farrell</i>
THE MILKMAID	<i>Nancy Winston</i>
THE BLINDMAN	<i>Joseph Graham</i>
THE BALLAD-SINGER	<i>Tom Powers</i>
THE HEADSMAN	<i>McKay Morris</i>

At this performance, which was not open to the public, Oscar Craik manipulated the mechanism of the Butterfly. At later performances it was decided to avoid this disturbing element in so simple a play, and ever after the Butterfly poised where he could see and hear, but not distract.

First public performance at Jordan Hall, Boston, Massachusetts, February 14, 1916, and at the 39th Street Theatre, New York City, November 27, 1916.

PROLOGUE TO THE THEATRE	<i>Florence Wollersen</i>
PROLOGUE TO THE PLAY	<i>Lew Medbury</i>
THE DEVICE-BEARER	<i>Edmond Crenshaw</i>
IN THE AUDIENCE	<i>Agnes Rogers</i>

THE BOY	<i>Gregory Kelly</i>
THE QUEEN	<i>Judith Lowry</i>
THE MIME	<i>Wilmot Heiland*</i>
THE MILKMAID	<i>Nancy Winston</i>
THE BLINDMAN	<i>Edgar Stehli</i>
THE BALLAD-SINGER	<i>Stuart Walker</i>
THE HEADSMAN	<i>McKay Morris</i>

* Played in New York by Willard Webster. When the play was "revived" in Indianapolis and Chicago in 1917, the Headsman was played by George Gaul.

THE BOY
THE QUEEN
THE MIME
THE MILKMAID
THE BLINDMAN
THE BALLAD-SINGER
THE DREADFUL HEADSMAN
YOU (*in the audience*)

The Scene is a kitchen

The Period is when you will

BALLAD OF THE MILLER'S SONS.



Six stal-wart sons the mil-ler had, All brave and fair to see;



He taught them each a wor-thy trade, And they grew gal-lant-ly.



Ta-ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta, ra-ta-ta-ta-ta-tee.

BALLAD OF THE THREE LITTLE PIGS.



Two lit-tle pigs were pink, pink, And one lit-tle pig was black, black;
Three lit-tle pigs were very good friends, But one lit-tle pig was black, black.

SIX WHO PASS WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

[Before the opening of the curtains the Prologue enters upon the forestage and summons the Device-Bearer, who carries a large copper pot.]

PROLOGUE

This is a copper pot. (*The Device-Bearer shows it to the audience carefully*) It is filled with boiling water. (*The Device-Bearer makes the sound of bubbling water*) It is on the fire. See the flames. (*The Device-Bearer sets the pot in the center of the forestage and blows under it with a pair of bellows*) And see the water boiling over. (*The Device-Bearer again makes the sound of bubbling water and then withdraws to where he can see the play from the side of the forestage*) We are looking into the kitchen of the Boy, whose mother left him alone. I do not know where she has gone, but I do know that he is gathering lentils now.

YOU

What are lentils?

PROLOGUE

A lentil? Why, a lentil, don't you see, is not a bean nor yet a pea; but it is kin to both... You must imagine that the boy has built the fire and set the water boiling. He is very industrious, but you need not feel sorry for him. His

SIX WHO PASS

mother is very good to him and he is safe. Are you ready now? . . . Very well. Be quiet. (*The Prologue claps his hands twice. The curtains open and a kitchen is disclosed. There are a bench, a stool, and a cupboard. A great door at the back opens into a corridor. There are also two windows—one higher than the other looking upon the corridor. At the right a door opens into the bedroom of the Boy's mother. A great pewter spoon lies upon the shelf in the cupboard. A large Butterfly comes in through the doorway, flits about and looks off stage. The song of the Boy is heard from the garden. The Butterfly goes to the door, poises a moment, then alights on the cupboard. The Boy enters with a great bowl filled with lentils. The Butterfly flies to the bowl and, satisfied, returns to the cupboard. The Boy smiles at the Butterfly, but he does not touch him. Then he empties the lentils into the pot and water splashes on his careless hand. A moan is heard in the distance. The Boy and the Butterfly go to the door. The Queen's voice is heard calling: Butterfly, Butterfly, where shall I hide? (Enter the Queen.)*)

QUEEN

Boy, Boy—oh, I am distraught!

YOU

What is distraught?

PROLOGUE

Distraught means distracted, perplexed, beset with doubt, worried by some fear.

BOY (*pityingly*)

Why are you distraught?

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

QUEEN

Oh—oh—oh—They are going to behead me!

BOY

When?

QUEEN

Before mid-day.

BOY

Why are they going to behead you? Is it a story? Tell it to me.

QUEEN

I was guilty of a breach of etiquette.

BOY

What is that?

QUEEN

I did something that was considered bad manners, and the law says the punishment is decapitation.

YOU

What is decapitation?

PROLOGUE

Decapitation is beheading—cutting off one's head.

BOY

Why, only kings and queens can be decapitated.

QUEEN

Oh, I know—I know—

BOY (*disappointed*)

Are you a queen?

QUEEN

Yes.

BOY

I thought all queens were big. My mother says they are always regal. And my mother knows

SIX WHO PASS

QUEEN

Oh, I *am* the queen. I *am* the queen; but I am so unhappy.

BOY

My mother told me kings and queens knew no fear. Why, you're afraid!

QUEEN

Oh, Boy, Boy, I *am* your queen, and I *am* afraid and unhappy. And queens are just like other people when they are afraid and unhappy.

BOY (*disappointed*)

Aren't they always regal?

QUEEN

No—no. Oh, little boy, hide me! Hide me from the Dreadful Headsman!

BOY

I haven't any place to hide you. You couldn't get under the bench, and you couldn't get into the cupboard.

QUEEN

Little boy, can't you see that I shall lose my head if I am found?

BOY

You might have hidden in the pot if I hadn't put it on the fire.

QUEEN

Oh—Oh—Oh—

BOY

I'm sorry.

QUEEN

I am distraught.

BOY

Well, I'll hide you because you are distraught;



The Boy.



The Milkmaid.



The Dreadful Headsman.



The Blindman.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

but—I am not sure you are a queen. . . .
Where's your crown? You can't be a queen
without a crown! (*She reaches up to her head.*)

QUEEN

Oh, I was running so fast that it must have
slipped from my head. (*Sees the Butterfly*)
Butterfly, tell him I am your Queen. (*The But-
terfly flies to her head and lights on her dis-
heveled locks like a diadem.*)

BOY

Oh, I have talked to the Queen! . . . You
can hide in my mother's bed-room in there; but
first please tell me a story.

QUEEN

They will find me here. I'll tell you a story
afterward.

BOY

I want you to tell me now.

QUEEN

Well, you watch at the door and warn me when
you see someone coming. (*The Butterfly*
brushes her ear) But stay, the Butterfly says
he'll watch. (*The Butterfly goes to the door.*)

BOY

Will he know?

QUEEN

Oh, yes. He is a wonderful butterfly—wise
beyond his years.

BOY

Sit down and tell me your story. (*He places*
a black pillow for the Queen on the step and an
orange pillow for himself.)

SIX WHO PASS

QUEEN

Last night we celebrated the second year of peace with the neighboring kingdom. We were dancing the minuet just after the banquet, when I stepped on the ring-toe of my husband, the King's great-aunt.

BOY

Didn't you say excuse me?

QUEEN

It was useless. The law says that if a queen steps on the ring-toe of the King's great-aunt or any member of her family the Queen must be beheaded while the King's four clocks are striking twelve at mid-day.

BOY

Oh, that means to-day?

QUEEN

Yes.

BOY

Why, it's almost mid-day now. See, I've just set the lentils boiling.

QUEEN

If you can hide me until after the King's four clocks strike twelve I shall be safe.

BOY

Why are there four clocks?

QUEEN

Because the law allows only one clock for each tower in the castle.

BOY

Then I hear all the King's clocks every day! There's a big clock, and two clocks not so big, and a tiny little clock.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

QUEEN

Yes, those are the four.

BOY

Why will you be safe *after* the four clocks strike twelve?

QUEEN

Because that is the law.

BOY

Aren't laws funny?

QUEEN

Funny? This one is very sad, I think.

BOY

Mightn't it be twelve any mid-day?

QUEEN

No; the Prime Minister of my grandfather who passed the law decided that it meant only the following mid-day.

BOY

(*rising and rushing to the door*) They'll find you here.

QUEEN

(*rising calmly*) Oh, no; this is the short cut to the beheading block. Through that corridor.

BOY

Why didn't you run the other way?

QUEEN

Because they always search for escaped people in that direction. So I ran through your garden and into this room. They'll never search for me so close to the castle.

BOY

How did you escape?

SIX WHO PASS

QUEEN

I— (*The Butterfly seems agitated.*)

BOY

You—

QUEEN

Someone is coming! Hide me!

BOY

In here—in my mother's room. 'Sh! 'Sh!
(*The Queen goes out. Enter the Mime. He pokes his head in the lower window and peeps around the door. The boy turns.*)

BOY (*weakly*)

Are you the Dreadful Headsman?

MIME

What?

BOY

Are you the Dreadful Headsman?

MIME

Do I look like a headsman?

BOY

I don't know; I've never seen one.

MIME

Well, suppose I am?

BOY

Are you?

MIME

Maybe I am.

BOY

Oh!

MIME

Booh!

BOY

I'm—I'm—not afraid.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

MIME

Bah!

BOY

And my mother isn't here.

MIME

Br—r—r—r! (*The Boy reaches for his knife.*)

MIME

Bing!

BOY

I wasn't going to hurt you!

MIME

'Sh... 'Sh... 'Sh!...

BOY

I'll give you my knife if you'll go 'way.

MIME

Ah—ha!

BOY

It's nearly mid-day and you'd better go.

MIME

Well, give me the knife.

BOY

Promise me to go.

MIME

(*laughs, turning away*) Aren't you going to the beheading?

BOY

No. I have to boil the lentils for our mid-day meal.

MIME

May I come back and eat some?

BOY

You'll have to ask my mother.

SIX WHO PASS

MIME

Where is she?

BOY

She's over that way. She went to the market to buy a bobbin.

YOU

What is a bobbin?

PROLOGUE

A bobbin is a spool upon which thread is wound, and it is sharp at one end so that it can be easily passed backward and forward, to and fro, through the other threads in making lace.

MIME

(*starting off*) Well, I'll be back to eat some lentils.

BOY (*too eagerly*)

You'd better hurry.

MIME

You seem to want to get rid of me.

BOY (*allaying suspicion*)

Well, I think you'd better go or you'll be late—and it's very wrong to be late.

MIME

(*going toward the door*) I think I'll— (*changing his mind*) sit down.

BOY (*disappointed*)

Oh!

MIME

What would you say if I wasn't the Headsman?

BOY

But you said you were.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

MIME

I said *maybe* I was.

BOY

Aren't you?

MIME

Maybe I'm not.

BOY

Honest?

MIME

Um, hum.

BOY (*relieved*)

Oh! . . .

MIME

You *were* afraid.

BOY

No . . . I wasn't.

MIME

Would you fight?

BOY

You bet I would.

MIME

It wouldn't take me a minute to lick you.

BOY

Maybe it wouldn't; but I wouldn't give up right away. That would be cowardly. . . . Who are you?

MIME

I'm a mime—

BOY

What's a mime?

MIME

A mime's a mime.

SIX WHO PASS

BOY

Go on and tell me.

MIME

A mime's a mountebank.

BOY

What's a mountebank?

MIME

A mountebank's a strolling player.

BOY

Are you going to perform for me?

MIME

Not to-day—I'm on my way to the decapitation.

BOY

Do you want to see the decapitation?

MIME

Well, yes. But most of all, I want to pick up a few coins.

BOY

How?

MIME

Why, I'll perform after the Queen has lost her head.

BOY

Won't you be too sorry?

MIME

No. You see, I'll be thinking mostly about what I'm going to do. I have to do my best because it is hard to be more interesting than a decapitation. And after it's all over the crowd will begin to talk and to move about, and I'll have to rush up to the front of them and cry out at the top of my lungs, "Stop—Ho, for

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

Jack the Juggler! Would you miss him? In London, where the king of kings lives, all the knights and ladies of the Court would leave a crowning to watch Jack the Juggler toss three golden balls with one hand or balance a weather-vane upon his nose." Then a silence will come upon the crowd and they will all turn to me. Someone will say, "Where is this Jack the Juggler?" And I shall answer, "Jack the Juggler, the greatest of the great, the pet of kings, entertainer to the Pope and the joy of Cathay stands before you." And I'll throw back my cloak and stand revealed. So! Someone will then shout, "Let us have it, Jack!" So I'll draw my three golden balls from my pouch—like this—and then begin. (*The Boy is watching breathlessly, and the Butterfly is interested, too. Their disappointment is keen when Jack does nothing.*)

BOY

Aren't you going to show me?

MIME

No, I must be off.

BOY

Aren't you ever coming back?

MIME

Maybe, yes; perhaps, no.

BOY

I'll give you some lentils if you'll juggle the balls for me.

MIME

(*sniffs the pot*) They aren't cooked yet.

BOY

Let me hold your golden balls.

SIX WHO PASS

MIME

(takes a gold ball from his pouch and lets the Boy hold it) Here's one.

BOY

And do they pay you well?

MIME

(taking the ball from the Boy) Ay, that they do. If I am as interesting as the beheading I'll get perhaps fifteen farthings in money and other things that I can exchange for food and raiment.

BOY

I'm going to be a mime and buy a castle and a sword.

MIME

Maybe so, and maybe not. Who knows? . . . Good-bye. *(He goes out.)*

BOY

(to the Butterfly) If he had been the Dreadful Headsman I would have slain him. So! . . . "Ah, wicked Headsman, you shall not behead the Queen! . . . Cross not that threshold, or I'll run you through." *(Through-out this the Butterfly shows great interest and enters into the spirit of it, being absorbed at times and frightened at others. Enter the Milkmaid at door.)*

MILKMAID

Pst! . . . Pst!

BOY *(startled)*

Oh!

MILKMAID

Are you going to the decapitation?

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BOY

No. Are you?

MILKMAID

That I am.

BOY

Will your mother let you go?

MILKMAID

She doesn't know.

BOY

Did you run away?

MILKMAID

No. I went out to milk the cow.

BOY

And did you do it?

MILKMAID

Yes.

BOY

Why didn't you wait until you came back?

MILKMAID

My mother was looking, and I had to let her see me doing something.

BOY

How did you get away when you took the milk pails into the house?

MILKMAID

I didn't take them in. As soon as my mother turned her back I hid the pails and I ran through here to take a short cut.

BOY

Where did you hide the milk?

MILKMAID

In the hollow tree.

SIX WHO PASS

BOY

Won't it sour?

MILKMAID

Maybe.

BOY

Won't your mother scold you?

MILKMAID

Yes, of course; but I couldn't miss the beheading.

BOY

Will you take the sour milk home?

MILKMAID

Yes; and after my mother scolds me, I'll make it into nice cheese and sell it to the King's Cook, and then mother will forgive me.

BOY

(*sniffing the pot*) You'd better hurry. It's nearly mid-day. Don't you smell the lentils?

MILKMAID

The Headsman hasn't started yet.

BOY (*giggling*)

He'd better hurry.

MILKMAID

They can't find the Queen.

BOY (*so innocently*)

Did she escape?

MILKMAID

Yes.

BOY

Are they hunting for her?

MILKMAID

Yes; and they've offered a big reward to the person who finds her.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BOY

How much?

MILKMAID

A pail of gold and a pair of finger rings.

BOY

That's a good deal. . . . With a pail of gold I could buy my mother a velvet dress and a silken kerchief and a bonnet made of cloth of gold—and I could buy myself a milk-white palfry.

MILKMAID

And you'd never have to work again.

BOY

But she's such a gentle queen. Where are they hunting her?

MILKMAID

Everywhere.

BOY

Everywhere! . . . Maybe she's waiting at the beheading block!

MILKMAID

Silly goose! She wouldn't try to escape this way. She'd go in the opposite direction.

BOY

Do people always run in the opposite direction?

MILKMAID

Of course; everybody knows that.

BOY

I wish I could go.

MILKMAID

Come on.

BOY

Um—uh. The lentils might burn.

SIX WHO PASS

MILKMAID

Pour some cold water on them.

BOY

Um—huh. I promised I wouldn't leave the house.

MILKMAID

Oh, it will be wonderful!

BOY

The Mime will be there.

MILKMAID

The one with the long cloak and the golden balls?

BOY

Um—huh.

MILKMAID

Ooh!

BOY

How did you know?

MILKMAID

I saw him on the way to the market one day—
and when my mother wasn't looking at me I
gave him a farthing.

BOY

Is he a good juggler?

MILKMAID

He's magic! Why, he can throw three golden
balls in the air and catch them with one hand
and then keep them floating in the air in a circle.

BOY

And can he balance a weathervane on his nose
while it's turning?

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

MILKMAID

Yes; and he can balance an egg on the end of a long stick that is balanced on his chin!

BOY

Oh—I wish I could see him. (*Looks at the pot to see if the lentils are done.*)

MILKMAID

Come on!

BOY

Well— (*Begins to weaken, and just as he is about to start, the Butterfly flits past him into the Queen's room.*)

MILKMAID

Oh—what a lovely butterfly!

BOY

No—No—I can't go. But you had better hurry.

MILKMAID

Well, I'll try to catch the butterfly first.

BOY

Oh, no; you mustn't touch that butterfly.

MILKMAID

Why?

BOY

Because—because he's my friend.

MILKMAID

Silly!

BOY

He is a good friend; and he's the wisest butterfly in the world.

MILKMAID

What can he do?

SIX WHO PASS

BOY

He can almost talk.

MILKMAID

Almost? . . . Oh, I know. I'm a goose.
You want to play a trick on me so I'll miss the
beheading.

BOY

You'd better hurry.

MILKMAID

I wish you'd come.

BOY (*sadly*)

I can't. I've a duty to perform.

MILKMAID

Aren't duties always hard? (*Both sigh. She
takes up her milk pail.*)

BOY

What are you going to do with that pail?

MILKMAID

I'm going to stand on it. . . . Good-bye.
(*She goes out.*)

BOY

Good-bye. (*He watches for a moment, then
goes to the pot and tries the lentils; then whis-
pers through door to the Queen*) The lentils
are getting soft. (*There is a fumbling in the
passage and a voice is heard*) Help the blind!
Help the blind! (*The Butterfly returns to the
top of the cupboard. The Blindman appears
at the door.*)

PROLOGUE

He's blind, but he'll show you how the blind
can see.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BLINDMAN (*sniffing*)

Cooking lentils?

BOY

Yes.

BLINDMAN

Cook, which way to the beheading?

BOY

Keep straight ahead—the way you are going,
old man.

BLINDMAN

Don't you want to take me with you?

BOY

I'm not going.

BLINDMAN

Not going to the beheading?

BOY

No; I have to cook the lentils.

BLINDMAN

Come on and go with me and maybe I'll give
you a farthing.

BOY

I can't.

BLINDMAN

Yes, you can. Who else is here?

BOY

(*swallowing—it's hard to fib*) No one.

BLINDMAN

Can't you run away? Your mother won't know
you've gone.

BOY

It's my duty to stay here.

SIX WHO PASS

BLINDMAN

It's your duty to help a poor blindman, little boy.

BOY

Are you stone blind?

BLINDMAN

Yes.

BOY

Then how did you know I was a *little* boy?

BLINDMAN

Because you *sound* like a little boy.

BOY

Well, if you're stone blind, why do you want to go to the beheading?

BLINDMAN

I can see with my ears.

BOY

Aw—

BLINDMAN

Didn't I know you were a little boy?

BOY

Yes, but you had to guess twice. First you thought I was a cook.

BLINDMAN

Well, aren't you cooking lentils?

BOY

Yes; but you can smell them.

BLINDMAN

Well, I see with my nose, too.

BOY

Aw—how can you see with your nose?

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BLINDMAN

If you give me some bread I'll show you.

BOY

I can't give you any bread; but I'll give you some raw lentils.

BLINDMAN

All right. Give me lentils.

BOY

. . . I'll put them by the pot. Ready!

BLINDMAN

All right. (*Sniffs. Walks to the pot and gets lentils and puts them in an old pouch*) Isn't that seeing with my nose?

BOY

H'm! (*In wonder*) Now see with your ears and I'll give you some more lentils.

BLINDMAN

All right. Speak. (*The Boy gets behind the stool and speaks. The Blindman goes toward him. The Boy moves around stealthily.*)

BLINDMAN

You're cheating. You've moved.

BOY

(*jumping up on the bench*) Well, where am I?

BLINDMAN

You're standing on something.

BOY

How did you guess it?

BLINDMAN

I didn't guess it. I know it.

BOY

Why can't I do that?

SIX WHO PASS

BLINDMAN

You can if you try; but it takes practice.

BOY

Can you see the door now?

BLINDMAN

No. I've turned around too many times. Besides, there is more than one door.

BOY

Oh—m-m. . . . You aren't really blind!

BLINDMAN

Blind people learn to use what they have. Once I, too, could see with my eyes.

BOY

Just like me?

BLINDMAN

Yes. And then I didn't take the trouble to see with my ears and my nose and my fingers—after I became blind I had to learn. . . . Why, I can tell whether a man who passes me at the palace gate is a poor man or a noble or a merchant.

BOY

How can you do that?

BLINDMAN

By the sound of the step.

BOY

Aw—how can you do that?

BLINDMAN

Shut your eyes and try it.

BOY

Well, I know what you are. That would be easy.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BLINDMAN

I'll pretend I'm somebody else. (*Feels with his stick; touches bench. Feels around again.*)

BOY

Why are you doing that?

BLINDMAN

To see how far I can walk without bumping into something.

BOY

Um—

BLINDMAN

Ready?

BOY

(*hides face in hands*) Yes.

BLINDMAN

Don't peep. (*The Boy tries hard not to.*)

BOY

I won't.

BLINDMAN

All ready (*shuffles like a commoner*) Who was it?

BOY

A poor man.

BLINDMAN

See how easy?

BOY

I could see him as plain as if I had my eyes open.
. . . Now try me again.

BLINDMAN

Ready?

BOY

All right. (*The Blindman seems to grow in*

SIX WHO PASS

height. His face is filled with a rare brightness. He steadies himself a moment and then walks magnificently down the room.)

BOY (*in beautiful wonder*)

A noble! I could see him.

BLINDMAN

All you have to do is try.

BOY

I always thought it was terrible to be blind.

BLINDMAN

Sometimes it is.

BOY

But I thought everything was black.

BLINDMAN

It used to be until I taught myself how to see.

BOY

Why is it terrible sometimes?

BLINDMAN.

Because I cannot help the poor who need help.
If I had money I could feed the hungry and
clothe the poor little beggar children in winter!

BOY

Would a pail of gold and a pair of finger rings
help you feed the hungry and clothe the poor
little beggar children in winter?

BLINDMAN

A pail of gold! I have dreamed of what I
might do with so much wealth!

BOY

I can get a pail of gold if I break a promise.

BLINDMAN

Would *you* break a promise?

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BOY

. . . No—but—No!

BLINDMAN

Of course you wouldn't.

BOY

I couldn't break a promise for *two* pails of gold.

BLINDMAN

Nor twenty-two, little boy.

BOY

When you walked like a noble I saw a beautiful man behind my eyes with a crown of gold.

BLINDMAN

If you broke a promise for a pail of gold and two finger rings you would never see a beautiful noble with a crown of gold when you closed your eyes. . . .

BOY

Can blind men see beautiful things even when it's rainy?

BLINDMAN

Blindmen can always see beautiful things if they try. Clouds and rain are beautiful to me, and when I get wet I think of the sunshine. I saw sunshine with my eyes when I was a little boy. Now I see it with my whole body when it warms me. I saw rain with my eyes when I was a little boy. Now I see it with my hands when it falls on them — drop — drop — drop — dropity — dropity—and I love it because it makes the lentils grow.

BOY

I never thought of that. Rain makes me stay indoors, and I never like it except in June.

SIX WHO PASS

BLINDMAN

You don't have to stay in for long.

BOY

Can blind men see beautiful things in a beheading?

BLINDMAN

No. But I must be there with the crowd. I shall tell stories to the people and perhaps they will give me food or money.

BOY

Can't you stay and tell me stories?

BLINDMAN

No. I must be on my way. . . . If I do not see the beheading I cannot tell about it when I meet someone who was not there. Oh, I shall make a thrilling tale of it.

BOY

Tell it to me when you come back.

BLINDMAN

If you give me some cooked lentils.

BOY

I'll save you some.

BLINDMAN

Are the lentils nearly done?

BOY

Half.

BLINDMAN

I must be on my way then. . . . Good-bye.
(*Starting to go in the wrong direction.*)

BOY

Here's the door.

BLINDMAN

Thank you, little boy. . . . Don't forget to

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

see with your ears and nose and fingers. (*The Blindman goes out.*)

BOY

I won't.

BLINDMAN

Good-bye.

BOY

Good-bye. (*The Boy covers his eyes and tries to see with his ears and his nose*) It's easier with the ears. (*Singing is heard. Enter the Ballad-Singer.*)

SINGER

Hello!

BOY

Hello!

SINGER

How are you?

BOY

I'm very well.

SINGER

That's good.

BOY

Thank you.

SINGER

Cooking?

BOY

Yes.

SINGER

(*coming into room*) Something good?

BOY

Lentils.

SINGER

Give me some?

SIX WHO PASS

BOY

They aren't done.

SINGER

Nearly. I can smell them.

BOY

Do you like them?

SINGER

When I'm hungry.

BOY

Are you hungry now?

SINGER

I'm always hungry. (*They laugh.*)

BOY

Were you singing?

SINGER

Yes.

BOY

Do you like to sing?

SINGER

When I get something for my ballads.

BOY

Are you a ballad-singer?

SINGER

Yes.

BOY

Sing one for me?

SINGER

Give me some lentils?

BOY

I'll give you some raw lentils.

SINGER

I want some of the cooked ones.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BOY

They aren't done.

SINGER

Are they nearly done?

BOY

More than half.

SINGER

I like them that way.

BOY

All right. Sing me a ballad.

SINGER

Well, give me the lentils first.

BOY

Oh, no; sing the ballad first.

SINGER

No, sir; give me the lentils first.

BOY

That isn't fair.

SINGER

Why not? After I sing to you maybe you won't pay me.

BOY

Yes, I will.

SINGER

Then why not pay me first?

BOY

You might not sing.

SINGER (*laughing*)

Yes, I will.

BOY (*laughing*)

Well, I'll give you some lentils at the end of each verse.

SIX WHO PASS

SINGER

That's a bargain.

BOY

Sing.

SINGER (*sings one line*)

Six stalwart sons the miller had—

Give me the lentils.

BOY

Finish that verse.

SINGER

I did finish it.

BOY

Now that's not fair. You only sang a line.

SINGER

Well, a line's a verse.

BOY

(*with a gesture that indicates how long a verse ought to be*) I meant a whole verse.

SINGER

(*mimicking the gesture*) A line's a whole verse.

BOY

Oh, now, be fair; I mean a *whole*, whole verse.

SINGER

You mean a *stanza*.

BOY

I always heard it called a verse.

SINGER

Well, keep to the bargain. I sang a verse. Give me some lentils.

BOY

(*rising and taking a very few lentils on his spoon*) Next time I mean a stanza. . . .

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

Here are some lentils. (*The Ballad-Singer eyes the meager portion, cools it and eats.*)

SINGER

Stingy.

BOY

Isn't that *some* lentils?

SINGER (*laughs*)

Well—

BOY

Now begin again.

SINGER

At the end of every stanza a spoonful of lentils.

BOY

I didn't say a spoonful.

SINGER

(*starts to go*) Very well, I won't sing a ballad.

BOY

All right. I'll give you a spoonful at the end of each—stanza. (*He sits on the floor by the pot of lentils.*)

SINGER (*sings*)

The Ballad of the Miller and his Six Sons

Six stalwart sons the miller had—

All brave and fair to see—

He taught them each a worthy trade

And they grew gallantly.

Tara—da—da—da-da-da—da-da-da

Tara—da—da—da-de—da-dee.

Give me some lentils.

BOY

Here. . . . Hurry up.

SIX WHO PASS

SINGER (*sings*)

The first was John of the dimpled chin—
And a fist of iron had he—
He learned to wield the broadsword well
And turned to soldiery.
Tara—da—da, etc.

BOY

Please! Please don't stop!

SINGER

Keep to the bargain.

BOY

Here, take two spoonfuls and finish without
stopping.

SINGER (*sings rest of ballad*)

The second son was christened Hugh—
And curly locks had he—
He learned to use the tabor and lute
And turned to minstrelsy.
Tara—da—da, etc.

The third was James of the gentle ways,
And speech of gold had he—
He learned his psalms and learned his creed
And turned to simony.
Tara—da—da, etc.

The fourth was Dick of the hazel eye,
And a steady hand had he—
With a hammer and saw and a chest of tools
He turned to carpentry.
Tara—da—da, etc.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

The fifth was Ned of the velvet tread,
And feather fingers had he—
He used his gifts in a naughty way
And turned to burglary.
Tara—da—da, etc.

The sixth was Robin, surnamed the Rare—
For always young was he—
He learned the joy of this sunny world
And turned to poetry.
Tara—da—da, etc.

The miller approached three score and ten—
A happy man was he—
His five good sons and the one who was bad
All turned to gallantry.
Tara—da—da, etc.

BOY

Sing me another.

SINGER

A spoonful at the end of every stanza.

BOY

Don't stop after you begin.

SINGER

Pay me in advance.

BOY

I suppose I'll have to. (*He feeds the Ballad-Singer.*)

SINGER (*sings second ballad*)

The Ballad of the Three Little Pigs
Two little pigs were pink—pink—pink—
And one little pig was black—black—
The three little pigs were very good friends,
But one little pig was black—black.

SIX WHO PASS

Three little pigs would play—play—play—
But one little pig was black—black—
And three little pigs would have a jolly time,
Though one little pig was black—black.

Three little pigs soon grew—grew—grew—
And one little pig was black—black.
The three little pigs became fat hogs—
And one fat hog was black—black.

The two fat hogs were pink—pink—pink—
And one fat hog was black—black.
The three fat hogs all made good ham,
Though one fat hog was black—black.

BOY

Sing me another.

SINGER

I can't. I'm tired.

BOY

Are you going to sing those at the beheading?

SINGER

What beheading?

BOY

At the Queen's beheading?

SINGER

Where?

BOY

Over there.

SINGER

When?

BOY

To-day.



The Boy and the Ballad Singer.



The Queen.



The Mime.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

SINGER

I must be going. Certainly I'll sing there, and
I'll take up a collection.

BOY

It's going to be before the King's four clocks
strike twelve.

SINGER

It's nearly time now. If I can collect a piece
of gold I can buy a vermilion robe and sing at
the King's court.

BOY

I could collect a pail of gold and two finger
rings and sit at the feet of the King if I'd break
a promise.

SINGER

Perhaps you will.

BOY

Would you?

SINGER

I'd rather sing along the highway all my life.
It is better to dream of a vermilion robe than
to have one that is not honestly got.

BOY

The Blindman said something like that.

SINGER

Who said what?

BOY

The Blindman said if I broke a promise I'd
never again see a beautiful noble with a golden
crown when I closed my eyes.

SINGER

He was right.

SIX WHO PASS

BOY

When you get your vermillion robe will you
let me see it?

SINGER

That I will. . . . Good-bye.
Good-bye. (*Singer goes out.*)

BOY

(*hums a snatch of the ballads.*)
(*The Headsman steps into the door and plants
his axe beside him for an impressive picture.
The Boy turns and starts in terror.*)

HEADSMAN

Have you seen the Queen?

BOY

Sir?

HEADSMAN

Have you seen the Queen?

BOY

How should I, sir? I've been cooking the len-
tils.

HEADSMAN

She is here!

BOY

How—could—she—be—here, sir?

HEADSMAN

Well, if she isn't here, where is she?

BOY (*relieved*)

I don't know where she is if she isn't here, sir.

HEADSMAN

She has too much sense to hide so near the castle
and on the short cut to the headsman's block.
. . . Do you know who I am?

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BOY

I think so—sir.

HEADSMAN

Think? Don't you *know*?

BOY

Yes, sir.

HEADSMAN

Who am I, then?

BOY

You're the Dreadful Headsman.

HEADSMAN

I am the winder of the King's four clocks, *and* when I am needed I am the best headsman in three kingdoms. And *this* is my axe.

BOY

Is it sharp?

HEADSMAN

It will split a hare in two. (*Runs finger near blade meaningly.*)

BOY

Oh!

HEADSMAN

A hare in two!

BOY

Would you really cut off the Queen's head?

HEADSMAN

That's my business—to cut off heads—and the nobler the head, the better my business.

BOY

She's such a nice queen.

HEADSMAN

Have you seen her?

SIX WHO PASS

BOY

Y—es, sir.

HEADSMAN

When?

BOY

One day—when I was boiling some lentils.

HEADSMAN

Did you see her neck?

BOY

Yes, sir.

HEADSMAN

Not much bigger than a hare.

BOY (*desperately friendly*)

Have you seen my knife?

HEADSMAN (*sharply*)

I'm talking about the Queen, and I'm going to talk about myself until I hear the King's trumpeter calling me to the beheading.

BOY

Yes, sir. (*Edging between the bench and door of the room where the Queen is hidden.*)

HEADSMAN

Sit down.

BOY

I'd rather stand, sir.

HEADSMAN

Sit down! And I'll tell you how I'm going to behead the Queen.

BOY

You can't behead her after the King's four clocks have struck twelve.

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

HEADSMAN

How did you know that?

BOY

(realizing his blunder) Well—

HEADSMAN

Nobody knows that except the royal family and people of the court.

BOY

A little—bird told—me.

HEADSMAN

Where is the little bird that I may cut its head off?

BOY

Don't hurt the little bird; but tell me how you are going to behead the Queen.

HEADSMAN

Well— *(At the stool)* This is the block. There's the Queen behind the iron gate. We'll say that door is the gate. *(The Boy starts)* And out there is the crowd. Now, I appear like this and walk up the steps. The crowd cheers, so I bow and show myself and my axe. *(He bows elaborately three times and then poses for one magnificent moment)* Then I walk over to the gate—

BOY

Don't go in there. That's my mother's room, and you might frighten *her*.

HEADSMAN

Who's in your mother's room?

BOY

She is.

SIX WHO PASS

HEADSMAN

Well, if she's in there, maybe she'd like to hear my story.

BOY

She's in bed.

HEADSMAN

Sick? (*The Boy nods vigorously*) All right.
. . . Well, I've bowed to the crowd and I start for the Queen— If you won't open the door, you pretend you're the Queen.

BOY

I don't want to be the Queen.

HEADSMAN

Come on and pretend. I walk up to the gate— so, and open it, and then I say, "Your Majesty, I'm going to cut off your head," and she bows—*Bow— (The Boy bows)* And then I say, "Are you ready?" and she says, "I am ready." Then I blindfold her—

BOY

Now, don't blindfold me, sir!

HEADSMAN

I'm showing you how it's done.

BOY

But if you blindfold me I can't see you when you do it.

HEADSMAN

(*admitting the point*) All right. . . . Then I blindfold her and I lead her to the block and I say, "Have you made your peace with Heaven?" and she says, "Yes." . . .

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

BOY

If you won't tell me any more I'll give you my knife.

HEADSMAN

Aren't you interested?

BOY

Yes; but your axe is so sharp, and it might slip.

HEADSMAN

Sharp? It will cut a hair in two; but I know how to handle it. . . .

BOY

How do you spell hair?

HEADSMAN

Either way. . . . Come on. . . . (*The Boy reluctantly falls into the picture again*) And then. . . . (*Raising his axe*) And then. . . . (*Headsman sees the Butterfly*) And then. . . . How-d'-ye-do, Butterfly (*The Boy runs to the pot unnoticed by the Headsman.*)

BOY

Lentils, lentils, boil the time away,
That my good queen may live to-day.
(*The Headsman and the Butterfly are having quite a game. Suddenly the great clock begins to strike and the two next larger follow slowly. The Headsman rushes to the back door with his axe.*)

HEADSMAN

Why doesn't the trumpeter blow his call? (*The Boy counts the strokes of the clock, and as the third clock strikes twelve he rushes to the door of the bedroom.*)

SIX WHO PASS

BOY

Queen! Queen! It's mid-day!

HEADSMAN

Queen—Queen— (*He strides to the bedroom and drags the Queen out*) The little clock hasn't struck yet! (*He pulls the Queen toward the rear door and shouts*) Here! Here! Don't let the little clock strike! I've won the pail of gold! (*The Boy has set the bench in the doorway so that the Headsman stumbles. The Butterfly keeps flying against the Headsman's nose, which makes him sneeze.*)

BOY

No one heard you!

QUEEN

Let me go! Let me go!

HEADSMAN

(*sneezing as only a headsman can*) The Queen! The Queen! (*The little clock begins to strike. The Boy counts eagerly, one, two, three, etc. Between strokes the Headsman sneezes and shouts*) The Queen! The Queen! (*At the fifth stroke the Headsman falls on his knees. The Queen becomes regal, her foot on his neck. The Boy kneels at her side.*)

QUEEN

Base villain! According to the law I am saved! But you are doomed. As Winder of the King's four clocks the law commands that you be decapitated because the four clocks did not strike together. Do you know that law?

HEADSMAN

Oh, Lady, I do; but I did but do my duty. I

WHILE THE LENTILS BOIL

was sharpening my axe this morning and I couldn't wind the clocks. Intercede for me.

QUEEN

It is useless.

BOY

Is there any other headsman?

QUEEN

The law says the Chief Headsman must behead the Chief Winder of the King's four clocks.

BOY

Can the Dreadful Headsman behead himself?

QUEEN

Aye, there's the difficulty.

HEADSMAN

Oh, your Majesty, pardon me!

BOY

Yes, pardon him.

QUEEN

On one condition: He is to give his axe to the museum and devote all his old age to the care of the King's four clocks. . . . For myself, I shall pass a law requiring the ladies of the court to wear no jewels. So, if the King's aunt can wear no rings, she assuredly cannot have a ring-toe, and hereafter I may step where I please.

. . . Sir Headsman, lead the way. . . .

And now, my little boy, to you I grant every Friday afternoon an hour's sport with the Mime; a spotted cow for the little Milkmaid; a cushion and a canopy at the palace gate for the Blindman; a vermilion cloak for the Ballad-Singer; a velvet gown, a silken kerchief, and a cloth-of-gold bonnet for your mother, and for

SIX WHO PASS

yourself a milk-white palfry, two pails of gold,
two finger rings, a castle, and a sword. . . .
Arise, Sir Little-Boy. . . . Your arm.

BOY

May I take my knife, your Majesty?

QUEEN

That you may. (*He gets the knife and returns
to her. She lays her hand on his arm*) Sir
Headsman, announce our coming.

HEADSMAN

Make way—make way for her Majesty the
Queen.

QUEEN (*correcting*)

And Sir Little-Boy.

HEADSMAN

What's his other name, your Majesty?

BOY

(*whispering with the wonder of it all*) Davie.

QUEEN

(*to the Headsman*) Davie.

HEADSMAN

Make way—make way for her Majesty the
Queen and Sir Davie Little-Boy. (*They go
out. Immediately the Boy returns and gets the
pot of lentils and runs after the Queen as*

The Curtains Close.)

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Ancey (George)—M. Lamblin
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Cannan (Gilbert)—Mary's Wedding
Dowson (Ernest)—The Pierrot of the Minute
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Hankin (St. John)—The Constant Lover
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Mukerji (Dhan Gopal)—The Judgment of Indra
- IRELAND
Gregory (Lady)—The Workhouse Ward
- HOLLAND
Speenhoff (J. H.)—Louise
- HUNGARY
Biro (Lajos)—The Grandmother
- ITALY
Giosoca (Giuseppe)—The Rights of the Soul
- RUSSIA
Andreyev (Leonid)—Love of One's Neighbor
Tchekoff (Anton)—The Boor
- SPAIN
Benevente (Jacinto)—His Widow's Husband
Quinteros (Serafina and Joaquin Alvarez)—A Sunny Morning
- SWEDEN
Strindberg (August)—The Creditor
Wied (Gustave)—Autumn Fires
- UNITED STATES
Beach (Lewis)—Brothers
Cowan (Sada)—In the Morgue
Crocker (Bosworth)—The Baby Carriage
Cronyn (George W.)—A Death in Fever Flat
Davies (Mary Carolyn)—The Slave with Two Faces
Day (Frederick L.)—The Slump
Flanner (Hildegard)—Mansions
Glaspell (Susan)—Trifles
Gerstenberg (Alice)—The Pot Boiler
Helburn (Theresa)—Enter the Hero
Hudson (Holland)—The Shepherd in the Distance
Kemp (Harry)—Boccaccio's Untold Tale
Langner (Lawrence)—Another Way Out
MacMillan (Mary)—The Shadowed Star
Millay (Edna St. Vincent)—Aro da Capo
Moeller (Philip)—Helena's Husband
O'Neill (Eugene)—Ile
Stevens (Thomas Wood)—The Nursery Maid of Heaven
Stevens (Wallace)—Three Travelers Watch a Sunrise
Tompkins (Frank G.)—Sham
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